



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
Old State House 150 Benefit Street Providence, RI 02903

Telephone 401-222-2678
TTY 401-222-3700

Fax 401-222-2968
www.preservation.ri.gov

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Contact: Sarah Zurier, RIHPHC, 401-222-4142, szurier@preservation.ri.gov

**FROM FARMS AND FIELDS TO FOUR-SQUARES AND BUNGALOWS:
ELMGROVE GARDENS HISTORIC DISTRICT LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

A well-preserved example of an early 20th-century residential suburb on the East Side of Providence has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture and community planning/development. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the Elmgrove Gardens Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. Platted between 1887 and 1928, the district's layout of streets and house lots reflects a transition from the era of the public streetcar to the automobile age. The district is also distinctive for being platted mostly by the same extended family that had owned and farmed the land for nearly two centuries.

The compact, four-block Elmgrove Gardens Historic District is bounded by Rochambeau Avenue, Cole Avenue, Woodbury Street, and Morris Avenue. Buildings include one fire station and 141 primarily single-family houses in an eclectic mix of period styles, including Colonial Revival, Dutch Colonial, and Tudor Revival. The district's rectilinear street plan and compact house lots indicate that it was originally planned to offer easy walking to public streetcars, but many homes

have period garages, demonstrating the rise of the automobile in the 1920s and 1930s. Since the end of World War II, the district has retained all but one of its original buildings, and has seen very little new construction.

During the colonial era, this part of Providence was accessible by only four public routes, including Hearnton's Lane (now Rochambeau Avenue). The primary use of the land was agriculture, with a few scattered farmsteads. Phebe Brown, whose family had owned property in the area since the 17th century, built a house in 1745. The Phebe and Phineas Brown House at 287 Rochambeau Ave. and their son's house, the c. 1793 Morris Brown House at 317 Rochambeau, are the oldest surviving buildings in the historic district.

In 1856, Hearnton's Lane was renamed North Street to recognize its status as a boundary between Providence and North Providence. With the city's population surging, Providence annexed a large portion of North Providence in 1874 and extended the city's northern border from North Street to the present Pawtucket city line. Almost immediately, some property owners began to survey their open agricultural lands for residential subdivisions.

Phebe Brown's 18th-century farm was still relatively intact by 1875. Approximately 80% of the land belonged to family members, and most of it was still in agricultural use. In 1887, Phebe Brown's great-great-grandson Albert M. Smith recorded a plat of 23 house lots east of Morris Avenue and south of North Street. The Smith Plat introduced two new streets, Fosdyke and Woodbury. The majority of house lots in the Smith Plat contained about 4,500 square feet, typical of a "streetcar suburb" of the late 19th century (despite the fact that streetcar service was not yet available in the vicinity of this plat). Between 1875 and 1914, several more residential plats were recorded, but development proceeded at a slow pace. By 1907, only five houses stood within the Smith Plat, and seven houses stood on its fringes, all on Morris and Rochambeau avenues.

The arrival of streetcar service on Hope Street and new water and sewer lines on Morris and Rochambeau sparked a local building boom in the early 20th century. Of the district's 142 buildings, 13 went up between 1908 and 1918; 47 went up between 1918-1926, and another 53 between 1927-1937. Development progressed from west to east. In 1927, Phebe Brown's descendants recorded the last plat in the district, the Elmgrove Gardens Plat. Two years later the City built the brick and half-timber, Tudor Revival-style Engine #4 Fire Station (270 Rochambeau) to serve the growing neighborhood. By 1950, only one vacant lot remained and almost all of the house lots had garages standing on them, many designed with materials and features copied from the main house.

The National Register nomination for the Elmgrove Gardens Historic District was prepared by preservation consultant Kathryn Cavanaugh and Mary Kate Harrington, Director of Preservation Services at the Providence Preservation Society. Project funding came from a Certified Local Government Grant from the RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC). According to Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RIHPHC, "The houses built in Elmgrove Gardens in the early 20th century offered homes for Providence families in a semi-suburban setting. Today this historic neighborhood still attracts families to its well-built houses and landscaped yards."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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